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ABSTRACT

A practicum addressed the problems of low reading levels, deficient writing skills, and poor attitudes toward reading. The objectives were to increase reading levels, improve writing skills, and improve attitudes toward reading and in this process to improve critical thinking skills. The target group was a sixth-grade language arts class of 23 students with mixed socio-economic backgrounds. During the 12-week period, the newspaper was used as a tool to promote relevancy in reading and to motivate students to greater proficiency in reading and writing. Students chose newspaper articles centered on a variety of assigned themes, summarized the articles, and supplied written answers to critical thinking questions relating to core issues. Sixth-grade instructors in the disciplines of social studies, mathematics, and science also implemented newspaper-related projects in their classrooms one day each week. Evaluation was done with a survey of student attitudes, the Botel Reading Inventory, and essay writing evaluated by holistic criteria. Results indicated improvements in all objective areas. (Thirty-seven references are attached. Appendixes include a survey of student attitudes and a listing of themes and critical thinking questions.) (Author/MG)

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A PROGRAM FOR MOTIVATING SIXTH GRADE LANGUAGE
ARTS STUDENTS TO IMPROVE READING LEVELS
THROUGH USING NEWS PERIODICALS WITH AN
EMPHASIS ON RELEVANCE AND CRITICAL
THINKING

, by

Sharon Schumacher

A Practicum Report

Submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the
Advance of Education, Nova University, in
Partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science.

The abstract of this report may be placed in a
National Database System for reference.

March, 1991

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ABSTRACT

A Program for Motivating Sixth Grade Language Arts Students to Improve Reading Levels Through Using News Periodicals with an Emphasis on Relevance and Critical Thinking.

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The Center for the Advancement of Education.

Descriptors: Critical Thinking/ Critical Reading/ Logical Thinking/ Problem Solving/ Reading Achievement/ Reading Ability/ Reading Attitudes/ Reading Improvement/ Creative Thinking/ Creative Teaching/ Secondary Education/ Secondary Schools/ Grade 6/ Secondary School Students/

This practicum addressed the problems of low reading levels, deficient writing skills, and poor attitudes toward reading. The objectives were to increase reading levels, improve writing skills, and improve attitudes toward reading and in this process to improve critical thinking skills. The target group was a sixth grade language arts class with mixed socio-economic backgrounds. The writer used the newspaper as a tool to promote relevancy in reading and to motivate students to greater proficiency in reading and writing. Students chose newspaper articles centered on a variety of assigned themes, summarized the articles, and supplied written answers to critical thinking questions relating to core issues. Evaluation was done with a survey of student attitudes, the Botel Reading Inventory, and essay writing evaluated by holistic criteria. Results at the end of implementation showed improvements in all objective areas. The writer will share findings of this project with the district level Language Arts Curriculum Specialist so that this intervention will be made available to other schools. Appendices include a survey of student attitudes and a listing of themes and critical thinking questions.

Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. When it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other professionals in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Signed: _____

Student's name

Minor contributions of a professional character and comparable nonprofessional assistance may also be acknowledged.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	.11
Authorship Statement	iii
Observer's Verification.	.iv
Table of Contents.	v

Chapters

I. Purpose.	.1
II. Research and Solution Strategy	10
III. Method	22
IV. Results.	28
V. Recommendations.	35
Reference List.	37

Appendices

Appendix A: Student Survey of Attitudes . .	.42
Appendix B: Themes and Questions.	.44

CHAPTER I

Purpose

Background

The community in which the subject school is located is diverse and changing. According to the Chamber of Commerce, the subject county is the fastest growing county in its state and the twenty-third fastest growing county in the nation. In the past the population has consisted predominantly of retirement age persons who were attracted by the congenial climate, but rapid growth has brought an influx of younger families with children of school age. These new residents are of mixed socioeconomic backgrounds. A number of new families have been attracted to jobs in burgeoning shopping areas and service related businesses. Many single-parent families have settled here to be in proximity to grandparents.

Wage and salary levels are low because the community lacks manufacturing industry which would

employ both unskilled and technical workers. As a result, both parents in most two-parent households have to work to support the family. According to the Chamber of Commerce, the median family income is \$24,700 and the median per capita income is \$13,898. A 1980 study by the Chamber of Commerce of the population in the subject county revealed that 92.20 percent are White Americans, 1.90 percent are Black Americans, 1.21 percent are Spanish Americans, 20 percent are Native Americans, and 4.49 percent are of other origins.

The subject school is one of four junior high schools in the district. It has a student population of approximately 700 and serves grades six through eight. Class sizes range from approximately 25 to 30 pupils. There are two administrators, a guidance counselor, and 32 instructors.

Students are of mixed socio-economic backgrounds. An analysis of student population shows that 87.2 percent are White Americans, 7.3 percent are Black Americans, 2.1 percent are

Spanish Americans, 2.9 percent are Asian Americans, and .5 percent are Native Americans. Approximately 35 percent of the students come from single-parent households with low incomes.

The sixth grade instructors form a teaching team which includes expertise in four basic disciplines: language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. The writer is a language arts instructor teaching five classes each day. As part of a teaching team, the writer can influence change in all disciplines.

Many of the target students have insufficient opportunity for individual attention both at home and in the academic setting. Both parents are working, and single parents often maintain two jobs in order to support the family. Academic classes are large and provide little occasion for individual attention to the student.

Students spend quantities of time at home observing television or video games and very little time reading. Since busy parents have little opportunity to read, they do not serve as

role models to encourage reading for children. Schools must find a way to remove obstacles that hinder student progress in reading, and to challenge students to higher levels of reading ability.

Problem Statement

Reading is the key to all academic disciplines; and most frequently, it is the key that opens the doors to occupational success. The ability to read well and to comprehend what has been read is essential to effective communication skills and effective writing. Words are the feet upon which our society moves.

Because reading has become increasingly less important in most home settings, schools are viewed as the resource for learning reading. Society is changing rapidly and is demanding more from education; but the public school, much like the proverbial tortoise, moves slowly. Old methods and curricula no longer fulfill the needs of students and parents who demand quick,

positive results.

There is still a need for students to learn basic decoding skills, but instruction in reading needs to go far beyond these if the schools are to produce good readers. Rasinski, (1989:85) in his article "In Search of the 'Good' Reader," has taken a close look at the term. He says that the beginning student is first recognized as a good reader when he has mastered the skills of reading enough to get A's on a report card. Later the good reader is able to complete reading assignments, correctly answer the questions at the end of the assignments, and fill in satisfactory answers on work sheets. Rasinski goes on to say that more thought needs to be given to reading as a pleasurable as well as a functional activity. The good reader who has achieved adulthood will frequently choose to read for the evening rather than watch television. Rasinski concludes, "The United States is filled with citizens who know how to read but choose not to."

For many students reading is just another

subject to sit through in which minimal achievement will secure a passing grade. Reading as an academic subject area has not been made relevant to the students' world. Questions in the text can be answered using comprehension skills without the exercise of critical thinking or problem solving processes. Pleasurable attitudes and behaviors toward reading are not fostered, and the thought processes which tend toward expressive writing are not nurtured. Students need to be motivated to read for both information and enjoyment.

The 23 students in the target group were sixth graders ranging in age from 10 to 13 and coming from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. Twenty-nine percent of the students had been retained in at least one previous grade. Many were from low-income, single-parent families. A majority of these families had moved into the area recently and the students were experiencing the discomfort of leaving relatives and friends behind. Several of the students were suffering

from physical and emotional difficulties but were able to function reasonably well in the school environment and maintain regular attendance. Few homes represented fostered an academic focus, so difficulties in learning motivation needed to be resolved at school.

The students in the target group were taught by a team of four teachers which instructed the students in language arts, social studies, science, and mathematics. The writer was the language arts instructor. A written survey given to the sixth grade teaching team indicated a strong need for increased motivation in reading. All of the teachers surveyed responded that sixth grade students did not read enough, that they were not motivated to read independently, and that most were not reading on grade level. The teachers also indicated that much was being done to encourage reading with little resulting success.

Students' responses to a written survey indicated that 36 percent of the students did not feel confident when given material to read at

school and 32 percent did not enjoy reading when out of school. It was clear that changes needed to be made in traditional approaches to reading curriculum. Intervention focused on the affective as well as the academic domain. In this process the writer endeavored to promote relevancy and critical thinking skills in the classroom.

Outcome Objectives

After having discussed the problem, the writer saw that it was important to implement a program to achieve several objectives.

1. After a period of 12 weeks of implementation, 25 percent of the students in the target sixth grade language arts class will increase their reading level by one grade level and 50 percent will increase their reading level by one-half grade level as measured by the Botel Reading Inventory.
2. After 12 weeks of implementation, 35 percent of the target group will demonstrate satisfactory writing skills related to organization, language

usage, and mechanics in essays measured by holistic criteria.

3. At the end of the 12-week project, a written survey of attitudes toward reading will demonstrate a 20 percent increase in positive responses to affective questions (Appendix A:35).

Critical thinking skills were essential to the reading and writing processes. According to a study on the effects of reading and writing upon thinking critically (Tierney, et al, 1989:134),

Reading and writing in combination are more likely to prompt critical thinking than when reading is separated from writing or when reading is combined with knowledge activation or answering questions.

The writer examined improvement in the area of critical thinking skills, and this examination was done by teacher observation.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

The competent reader is one for whom reading is not only functional but also enjoyable. Rasinsky (1989) stated that while reading and comprehension skills are important, the love of reading must be fostered in students. Several suggestions were made to facilitate the development of the kinds of behaviors and attitudes needed to accomplish this. Rasinsky said that students must be surrounded with the best literature, that they must be led to discover for themselves that reading and writing are useful, that reading and writing are necessary for communication with the world outside the school, and that writing is a way to reflect their own feelings. Rasinsky concluded that right reading attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors must be reflected in reading instruction.

There is a current national emphasis in educational circles on developing readers who have

a command of higher order thinking skills. Coley and Hoffman (1990) studied thought processes and attitudes along with self-concept in relationship to school achievement in sixth grade reading students classified "at risk." Students used double entry/response journals as graphic organizers, for illustrations and comments on reading selections, and self-evaluation questionnaires for thought clarification. At the conclusion of the study, all students viewed themselves more positively as learners.

The general components of creative thinking according to Shapley (1984) are:

- It is aesthetic.
- It focuses on PURPOSE and PROCESS, not PRODUCT.
- It invites risk-taking. It means working at the edge of competence.
- It invites risk taking.
- It invites CRITICISM for the sake of growth.
- It encourages intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, motivation.

Shapely added that critical thinking skills in relationship to the evaluation of newspaper articles in the reading classroom would include interpreting information, evaluating a line of

reasoning, and distinguishing between the relevant and the nonrelevant.

Beacons, Teacher's Guide (1983) suggested that evaluation of critical thinking in reading would include the following:

1. Distinguishing between fact and opinion
2. Recognizing bias in reading
3. Evaluating statement of opinion
4. Recognizing and evaluating assumptions
5. Recognizing various propaganda techniques.

Kuhrt and Farris (1990) restructured lessons and sequenced activities in a fifth grade reading class to incorporate higher order thinking skills in order to empower students through reading, writing, and reasoning. In an example activity, a problem was presented to students which focused on choices and decision making with a story given for reading. Students rehearsed and clarified ideas through writing. Alternative solutions were discussed and charted. Kuhrt and Farris concluded that reading, writing, and learning strategies based upon learning outcomes empower students to use knowledge in relevant ways in the classroom.

A study on the effects of reading and writing

upon thinking critically by Tierney, et al., (1989) which involved undergraduate students from two large universities, examined the effects of writing, reading, and answering questions both separately and in combination with one another. The goal was to examine conditions that might contribute to or detract from critical thinking. Subjects were given essay topics and then asked to write and revise their essays. Prior to revision, some students were given additional information on the essay topics and some were not. By analyzing the changes made in these essays, Tierney was able to compare changes in students' thinking in relationship to reading and writing. He found that reading and writing together can be an aid to extending thinking and acquiring multiple perspectives.

In a study on problems in teaching critical reading, Bagford (1990) said that a major problem in this area is the lack of a widely acceptable definition of the term "critical reading." Bagford said that the term "higher order thinking

skills" has been used rather than "critical reading." He said that critical reading is an attitude of questioning, a quality method of logical inquiry, and a judgment factor on the part of the reader.

Bonds and Bonds (1990) said that, because reading instruction is often not exciting, teachers and students begin to develop an aversion for reading instruction. Several avenues for creating excitement in reading were suggested. The teacher should be perceived as a facilitator for learning and encouraging expansion of ideas and higher dimensions of thinking. Visual imagery, dramatization, the use of the library, television viewing, and newspaper reading motivate students' desire to read relevant materials. Students should create their own comprehension questions from stories, and accept more than one answer to a question. Bond and Bond concluded that creative teaching in reading is not contingent on a basal approach but on the ability to capitalize on situations that open fresh

avenues of thought and expression. Creative reading teachers can develop a lifelong love of reading in their students.

Fitzgerald (1990:42) described the processes of revision in writing and critical reading as "thought processes mirroring one another." Students were asked to read and then to compare texts with their own beliefs, goals, and expectations. Critical readers were given the option of changing the text or changing their beliefs, goals, and expectations in relation to the text. Fitzgerald concluded that certain kinds of revision would appear to enhance the development of critical reading.

The effectiveness of a skill-based, individualized reading program on reading achievement of adolescents with low reading ability was examined by Work and McLaughlin (1990). Modular individualized programs were developed in a progression of difficulty levels for fifth through tenth grade students using texts, workbooks, cassette tapes, recreational

reading materials, and computer software. The program demonstrated success in reading progress especially in middle school youth.

A survey of attitudes toward reading in seventh grade students by Russ (1989) revealed a higher positive attitude toward reading in the gifted class than in a comparison group of students reading far below level; however, the researcher was surprised to find some positive attitudes among those whose demonstrable achievement had not yet caught up with attitude. Russ found that when students' learning modality preferences were respected, students' attitudes toward reading improved.

Mathison (198:171) studied methods to activate student interest in content area reading. He said that a major task in teaching for thinking is to sustain "meaningfulness" in what teachers ask students to do. Mathison mapped five general strategies for motivating students to read:

1. Using analogies
2. Relating personal anecdotes
3. Disrupting readers' expectations
4. Challenging readers to resolve a paradox

5. Introducing novel and conflicting information

Casteel (1989) said that one of the most serious problems that teachers encounter in students is a lack of motivation to learn. According to Casteel, motivation tends to be the key to creating a positive reading environment conducive to classroom learning. A successful program for promoting motivation in reading was developed which included positive teacher responses to student behaviors, sustained silent reading, oral reading by the teacher, and group participation including brainstorming. Lynch (1990:15), in a similar study, said that students need to feel competent and to see themselves as the person causing changes in their environment. Lynch gave students "choices coupled with responsibility."

Gamble and Hashway (1990:10) studied a network of writing skills to determine if composition skills are organized according to a hierarchy. Students were asked to write an essay

of 100 to 200 words addressing the statement, "A Person Who Made a Change in My Life." The Thurstonian Scale was used to measure responsiveness, support/elaboration and organization, sentence formation, usage, and mechanics. The conclusion was that student writers found expressing a main idea with supporting details much easier than handling mechanics and editing skills.

Students in a first grade class experienced a new approach to an old method of learning when they were taught to sing, spell, write, and then read. The phonics approach to reading was found to be more successful than the "look and say" method. Students advanced quickly through levels of reading material; and at the end of the project, many were able to read the U.S. Constitution, the Bible, newspapers, and textbooks easily (Panikian, 1990).

Several technological innovations have been used to promote learning success in classrooms. A high school used cable T.V. as an instructional

resource and then created a cable network of its own presenting sports, educational, and original programming (Baca and Palmer, 1985). Computer programs to assist middle school through college teachers were investigated by Down and Sinatra (1990). After reviewing a variety of programming, they concluded that highly motivating teaching adjuncts such as microcomputer programs make the teaching and learning environment richer.

Cutler and Truss (1989) explored the efficacy of computer aided instruction in reading for deficient teenage readers. The apparatus used consisted of a graphics tablet on which the student placed a photocopied sheet of the reading material, a stylus, and a small speaker. When a student encountered difficulty with a word, the stylus was used to touch a spot near the word. The student would then hear the word pronounced. Results of the study showed a significant increase in reading rate and a decrease in word difficulty requests.

The writer reviewed many studies and

consulted with the chairperson of the Language Arts Department and the Language Arts Curriculum Specialist for the school district for suggestions and approached improvement in reading level, writing skills, attitude, and critical thinking skills in the sixth grade classroom using the newspaper as a motivational resource. The writer chose the newspaper as a resource because it made reading relevant. Since the newspapers were being provided through a grant, there was no cost to the student or to the school. Some students were hindered, because of limited knowledge of vocabulary, in their understanding of some news articles and required explanation. The newspaper activity fit into the time period allowed in the curriculum for reading and provided stimulation for reading and thinking outside the classroom setting.

The writer used a thematic approach developed for middle grades students, based on a curriculum developed by Berkowitz-Vova and Shapley (1990), to make reading and writing topics relevant. This

format combined oral brainstorming activities with written responses to critical thinking questions. Students responded to questions on various themes designed with an intent to develop higher level thinking skills. Newspapers were provided daily through a grant at no cost to the students. The writer served as facilitator to encourage thinking. Students showcased their thinking strategies and writing skills by oral presentations given to the class as feature stories on classroom "D7 News."

CHAPTER III

Method

Resources

Implementation of the 12-week solution strategy for the language arts curriculum was based on excerpts from Newspapers and Theme: An Integrated Language Arts Approach Designed for Middle Grade Students (Berkowitz-Vova and Shapely, 1990), Fun with Newspapers (1990), Reading the Newspaper on Assignment (1986), English: Critical Thinking and Writing (1989), Language Arts/Reading (1987), Guenther and Bushman (1984), and Bernier (1987). The social studies instructor used Garrett, et al., (1990), Classline Teacher's Guide for Basic/Elementary (1986), Current Events/Issues and Problems (1987), Guenther (1990), and Economics Today (1986) as resource materials. The science instructor used Morse (1986), Newspaper in Education (1989), and Guenther (1983) as resource materials. The mathematics instructor used Math, Using the Newspaper in Upper Elementary and Middle

Grades, 1986), and Dampf, et al. (1986) as resource materials.

Funds were provided for supplying ten newspapers each school day for 12 weeks through a grant from a local business. Authorization for this use of funds was obtained in collaboration with the Newspaper in Education Program Consultant, the school administrator, the county office coordinator, and the accountant. Newspapers received were shared with sixth grade teachers of social studies, science, and mathematics who were participating in the project. An overhead projector was used by the writer to model student activities.

Monitoring

The first week of implementation, several activities took place. Students were pretested using the Botel Reading Inventory, Form A (Modern Curriculum Press, Inc., 1978). They also wrote an essay which was evaluated using holistic grading criteria. Parents of the target group received a

letter explaining the project and urging them to participate with students in the reporting process. This letter had been approved by the administrator before it was sent home. The writer modeled thinking and writing activities which students did during implementation. An overhead projector used for the modeling presentation.

The next 10-week period of implementation followed a consistent format. Each day of the week students viewed a video-taped presentation of CNN (Cable News Network) News. A brief teacher-lead discussion, relating to the events broadcasted, followed the presentation. The discussion focus emphasized relevance of news events to students' lives.

One day a week each student received a newspaper. Activities centered on a different theme every week. A brainstorming activity promoted understanding of the theme for that week and encouraged critical thinking. Each student was asked to read a news article relevant to the theme for that week and write a report. Reports

followed a consistent format which included the headline of the newspaper article chosen by the student, the date of the newspaper, a short summary of the article, and student answers to questions (Appendix B:37) provided to challenge critical reading and thinking. An example theme was "Environment." Each student located an article appropriate to the theme, recorded the headline, the newspaper date, and wrote a brief summary. Written responses were then given to the following questions:

1. What has happened to the environment in 50 years?
2. How has this occurred?
3. What specific steps can we take to prevent this from continuing?
4. What will our planet look like 100 years from today if we continue to abuse the environment?

At appropriate times, groups worked together to formulate answers to questions.

On the following day student reporters presented their findings to the class orally in a format named for our classroom, "D7 News."

Presentations were given to simulate actual news broadcasting techniques. After each presentation questions were invited from the class for review and discussion. Group presentations were allowed when several students chose the same article for reporting. Students greeted our "D7 News" time with great enthusiasm.

Sixth grade instructors in the disciplines of social studies, mathematics, and science implemented newspaper-related projects in their classrooms one day each week. Social studies classes discussed and recorded current events in a notebook. Science classes found newspaper articles relevant to science and used class discussion and brainstorming to promote critical thinking. Mathematics classes used the newspaper to do comparisons of stock market reports and chart increases and decreases in prices.

The writer monitored progress of students in language arts classes by observation of oral reporting and by reading student responses to written reporting. Additional modeling was

provided when needed. Group discussions were monitored and restructured appropriately to facilitate good working relationships .

Evaluation

The twelfth week of implementation, the writer evaluated the results of the project. Students were given the Botel Reading Inventory, Form B (1978), which measures reading ability by grade level. Results were compared with the Botel Reading Inventory, Form A, which was given at the beginning of implementation. An essay was assigned for holistic evaluation to determine improvement in writing skills in comparison with an essay given the first week of implementation. Students received a survey to measure affective improvement in their attitudes toward reading both inside and outside the classroom setting to compare with the same survey given at the commencement of implementation. The writer observed continuing improvements in critical thinking processes as students assimilated and evaluated news information and happenings.

CHAPTER IV

Results

At the end of the 12-week implementation, the writer evaluated the success of objectives established in Chapter III.

1. Twenty-five percent of the students in the target sixth grade language arts class will increase their reading level by one grade level and 50 percent will increase their reading level by one-half grade level, as measured by the Botel Reading Inventory, Form B.

2. Thirty-five percent of the target group will demonstrate satisfactory writing skills related to organization, language usage, and mechanics in essays measured by holistic criteria.

3. A written survey of attitudes toward reading will demonstrate a 20 percent increase in positive responses to affective questions as measured by a written survey.

In the process of implementation, the writer motivated target students to improve reading

skills, writing skills, and attitudes toward reading by using the daily newspaper in a thematic approach. Students were given a different theme each week of implementation. An oral brainstorming activity encouraged critical thinking about the theme. Students were then asked to find a newspaper article relevant to the theme and write a report which consisted of the newspaper article headline, the date of the newspaper, a summary of the article in the students' own words, and answers to critical thinking questions appropriate to the theme. Oral presentations of the students' work were showcased for the class in a format for our classroom, "D7 News." Students greeted our "D7 News" times with great enthusiasm! Sixth grade instructors in the disciplines of social studies, mathematics, and science implemented newspaper-related projects in their classrooms one day each week.

Reading level was evaluated by using the Botel Reading Inventory Word Opposites Test, Forms A and B, to determine reading level by grade-level

year and month. On the Botel Reading Inventory Word Opposites Test, one grade level is equivalent to 10 months, and one-half grade level is equal to 5 months. A score of 5.4 would indicate that the student was reading at a level of fifth grade in the fourth month. Form A of the Botel Reading Inventory Word Opposites Test was given during the first week of implementation, and Form B was given the last week of implementation. A comparison of results from Form A and Form B indicated the following percentages of increase in reading level:

14 percent increased 3 to 4 months,
38 percent increased 5 to 9 months,
24 percent increased 1.1 to 1.5 grade levels, and
24 percent showed no increase in reading level.
Results were slightly less than the projected goal percentages of increase in reading levels, but the intervention was successful in producing both significant and substantial increases.

Student writing skills were evaluated by holistic criteria the first week of implementation

and also the last week of implementation. Skills were measured as to satisfactory or unsatisfactory performance in essay writing in three holistic areas: organization, language, and mechanics. Success was demonstrated in organization if the student gave events in logical order, described characters and setting, and connected the writing to the starter topic. Success was demonstrated in language if the student used a variety of sentence types, used language in a variety of ways, and exhibited no grammatical errors that would interfere with the message. Success was demonstrated in mechanics if there were few grammatical errors, if there were few spelling and punctuation errors, and if writing was easily legible.

A comparison of results from holistic grading exceeded the projected goal for advancement in writing skills. The essay given the first week of implementation resulted in the following scores: organization skills - 32 percent successful, language skills - 20 percent successful, and

mechanics - 16 percent successful. An average of these scores showed that 23 percent were successful over all. The remaining percentages of students exhibited unsuccessful skill ratings in the above areas on the first essay. The essay given the last week of implementation resulted in the following scores:

organization skills - 94 percent successful,
language skills - 83 percent successful, and
mechanics - 78 percent successful.

An average of these scores on the final essay showed 85 percent satisfactory performance over all. The remaining percentages of students exhibited unsuccessful skill ratings in the above areas on the second essay. A final comparison of the average scores obtained on the two essays showed an increase in writing skills of 62 percent.

At the beginning and ending of the 12-week project a written survey of attitudes toward reading (Appendix A:35) was administered. The initial survey indicated that 64 percent of the

students felt confident when given material to read at school and 68 percent enjoyed reading when out of school. The final survey showed that 91 percent of the students felt confident when given material to read at school and 66 percent enjoyed reading when out of school. Other responses were negative in each area of questioning. The resulting comparison of these surveys demonstrated a 27 percent increase in positive responses to the affective question related to confidence when given material to read at school and a two percent decrease in positive responses to the affective question related to enjoyment of reading when out of school. The lack of increase in positive responses to the affective question related to enjoyment of reading when out of school points to a need for more intervention to encourage reading outside the classroom. The increase in positive responses to affective questions relating to confidence in reading at school exceeded the projected goal percentage and was a significant indication of the success of this intervention.

The writer examined improvement in the area of critical thinking skills by teacher observation. The writer found that students soon became acclimated to thinking and writing about subject themes experientially. Students improved in several areas including the ability to interpret information, to detect bias, to distinguish fact from opinion, and to draw inferences.

In future use of this intervention, the writer would make some changes in implementation. The time period for use of the newspaper theme curriculum would be extended for additional weeks. Students would be given opportunity to supply themes and questions.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

Upon successful completion of implementation of this project, the writer plans to continue using this intervention in the classroom setting in future years. The writer intends to make this information available to other sixth grade language arts teachers by sharing it with the Chairperson of the Language Arts Department and with the other English teachers on the faculty at departmental meetings.

The writer will share the findings of this project with the Language Arts Curriculum Specialist of the school district. The Curriculum Specialist will observe the implementation process in the classroom. Through the Curriculum Specialist, this intervention can be made available to other schools in the district.

In future use of this intervention, the writer would recommend extension of the time period for use of the newspaper theme curriculum

to include an entire semester. Students would be given opportunity to supply additional themes and questions appropriate to these themes, as part of the critical thinking process.

Additional resources and implementation would expand the project to include several areas. Students would use news magazines in addition to the daily newspaper and would visit a newspaper office and a television newsroom. Students would be given an opportunity to present a current news story to the student body on the morning announcement program which is broadcasted to the entire school. Future objectives would look toward improving student attitude toward reading outside the classroom and improving student performance in oral presentation.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Student Survey of Attitudes

SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS

Would you please answer the following questions by writing the letter of the answer that best says how you feel.

Answers:

- A. Yes
- B. Strongly Yes
- C. No
- D. Strongly No

_____ 1. I enjoy reading when I am out of school.

_____ 2. I feel confident when I am given material to read at school.

Appendix B
Themes and Questions

THEMES AND QUESTIONS

1. Culture:

1. How would you define culture?
2. What elements make one culture different from another?
3. What basic similarities are found in all cultures?
4. Why do problems develop between people of different cultures?
5. What can be done to prevent these problems?

2. Decision Making:

1. What makes a decision difficult?
2. What factors are generally considered when making any important decision?
3. What are some good ways of arriving at a decision?
4. Identify the way that you feel prior to making a decision. How do you feel after you have come to a decision?

3. Environment:

1. What has happened to the environment in the last 50 years?
2. How has this occurred?
3. What specific steps can we take to prevent this from continuing?
4. What will our planet look like 100 years from today?

4. Power:

1. What is power?
2. How do you get power? How do you give power?
3. Define "power struggle."
4. Who in your family is powerful? In your school? In your country?

5. Justice and Law:

1. When in your life do you think that you have been treated with the most fairness or justice?
2. When have you been treated unfairly?
3. When have you been just in your treatment of others?
4. Do you think the laws of the nation, state, or local community are just? Why or why not?

6. Heroes:

1. Who is your favorite hero? Heroine?
2. What makes an ordinary person a hero?
3. Do you believe in hero worship? Why or why not?
4. Do you possess any heroic qualities? If so, what are they?

7. Future:

1. What do you see?
2. What do you hear?
3. What are people wearing?
4. How are people moving around?
5. What is good about the future?
6. What is bad?

8. Friendship:

1. What makes a person a friend?
2. How can you make new friends?
3. Why is it important to have friends?
4. What is your best friend like? Why do we have more than one friend?
5. Why are you a good friend? How can you be a better friend?

9. Fear:

1. What elements must something contain in order to be fearful?
2. What are most people afraid of?
3. Is the "known" or the "unknown" more frightening? Why?
4. Must something be real to be frightening?
5. What happens to the human body when one becomes frightened? Why?

10. Family Relationships:

1. How would you define family?
2. What is a nuclear family?
3. What is an extended family?
4. What has happened to families today?
Why do you believe this to be so?